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REPORT OF AFRICAN ANIMAL RESOURCES MINISTERS ON AVIAN INFLUENZA

SUMMARY ON AVIAN INFLUENZA REPORT

Avian Influenza is one of the most economically important diseases threatening the African continent today. Apart from being transmissible to humans, the disease poses a serious threat to Food Security and the livelihoods of the rural communities in the continent.

The current outbreaks of the avian flu that began in South –East Asia in mid-2003, are the largest and most severe on record. Never before in the history of this disease have so many countries been simultaneously affected, resulting in the loss of so many birds.

There is a potential risk that the avian flu virus might be carried by wild water birds along migratory flyways to Africa. Some birds are currently nesting in the newly avian flu affected areas of Novosibirsk and Altai in Russia and will migrate for upcoming winter to Africa.

Scientists believe that pandemic influenza will happen but when it will occur remains unknown. Supplies of vaccines and antiviral drugs the two most important interventions for reducing illness and deaths during a pandemic will be inadequate in all countries at the start of a pandemic and for many months thereafter.

In view of the eminent threat to the continent by the avian flu, the AU-IBAR developed a strategy at all levels on how to deal with the disease in case of an outbreak. At the national level, stumping out was recommended as an applicable option in countries with an efficient epidemiological surveillance system and adequate financial resources for compensation. Modified stamping out using vaccination and Vaccination in the high-risk areas could also be applied at national levels depending on the country situations. At the regional level, strengthening the capacity of the existing veterinary laboratories and surveillance systems has been considered as necessary**.**

The seventh AU Conference of Ministers Responsible for African Animal Resource held between 31 October - 4th November 2005 in Kigali Rwanda resolved in REQUESTING AU/IBAR TO collaborate WITH FAO, OIE, WHO and other partners, to take all the necessary steps to organize in the near future a meeting to assess the efficacy of the suggested strategies.

The African Union Commission (AUC), as a matter of urgency decided to put a comprehensive programme of action and has been working towards the installation of emergency preparedness and effective surveillance systems for the continent as recommended by the 7th Conference of Ministers responsible for animal resources held in Kigali, Rwanda In November 2005.

Report of Seventh AU Conference Of Ministers Responsible For Animal Resources on Avian Influenza (Bird Flu)

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Report of Seventh AU Conference Of Ministers Responsible For Animal Resources on Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) 3-4 NOVEMBER, 2005 KIGALI, RWANDA

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INTRODUCTION

The development of Africa livestock industry is seriously hampered by the negative impacts of many highly contagious and transboundary infectious diseases that constantly reduce Africa's capacity to achieve self-sufficiency in animal proteins. Quite often such diseases have the potential for serious and rapid spread irrespective of national boundaries and are of grave food security and socio-economic and/or public health importance in international trade of animals and animal products.

One of the most economically important diseases threatening the African continent today is the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), apart from being a zoonotic disease, it also causes high mortality among poultry population which is one of the the biggest source of income in rural areas.

The disease poses a serious threat to Food Security and the livelihoods of the rural communities in the continent. This is further complicated by the fact that the method of transmission and the rapid spread of the disease both nationally and internationally is not yet clearly understood. The African Union Commission (AUC), as a matter of urgency decided to put a comprehensive programme of action and has been working towards the installation of emergency preparedness and effective surveillance systems for the continent as recommended by the 7th Conference of Ministers responsible for animal resources held in Kigali, Rwanda In November 2005. This report presents the details of the programme of action being put in place by the African Union Commission against eventual outbreak of the disease in any part of the continent.

2. BACKGROUND

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has been recognised as a highly lethal generalized viral disease of poultry. Disease outbreaks occur most frequently in domestic fowl and turkeys. It causes high mortality among poultry population, which is one of the biggest source of income for poorest people living in rural areas. It has disastrous effects on poultry industry through its impact on international trade and domestic consumption of poultry products and a potential for a pandemic of human influenza including death of people.

The current outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza, which began in South –East Asia in mid-2003, are the largest and most severe on record. Never before in the history of this disease have so many countries been simultaneously affected, resulting in the loss of so many birds. The causative agent, the H5N1 virus has proved to be especially tenacious. Despite the death or destruction of an estimated 150 million birds, the virus is now considered endemic in many parts of countries of South-east Asia. It is believed that the control of the disease in poultry is expected to take several years. This is confirmed by the occurrence of the disease in eastern part of Europe in 2005 with deaths of wild birds from highly pathogenic H5N1. From

April to June, 2005 more than 6000 migratory birds have been reported to have died due to H5N1 infection at the Qinghai Lake Nature Reserve in Qinghai Province, China. This is a concern because many of these birds are migratory and travel over long distances across international borders. The influenza viruses are easily spread by fomites and survive and spread well in water. Furthermore, certain species of ducks are able to carry influenza viruses without exhibiting any clinical symptoms of disease. It is also important to note that the findings in Qinghai Lake-China, suggest that H5N1 viruses could possibly be transmitted between migratory birds. The new outbreaks of HPAI in poultry and wild birds in Russia, Kazakhstan, Western China and Mongolia may indicate that migratory birds probably act as carriers for the transport of HPAI over longer distances. Short distance transmission between farms, villages or contaminated local water bodies is likewise a distinct possibility. The AI virus has adapted to the environment in ways such as (1) the use of water for survival and to spread (2) has evolved in a reservoir (ducks) strictly tied to water.

The widespread persistence of H5N1 in poultry poses two main risks for human health. The first is the risk of direct infection when the virus passes (especially H5N1) from poultry to humans, resulting in very severe disease and deaths in humans. A second risk; of greater concern; is that the virus if given enough opportunities will change (mutation or re-assortment) into a form that is highly infectious for humans and spread easily from person to person. Health experts have been monitoring the H5N1 strain for almost 8 years. The H5N1 strain first infected humans in Hong Kong in 1997, causing 18 cases, including six deaths. Since mid-2003, this virus has caused the largest and most severe outbreaks in poultry on record. In December 2003, infections in people exposed to sick birds were identified. Since then, over 100 human cases have been laboratory confirmed in four Asian countries and more than half of these people have died. Most cases have occurred in previously healthy children and young adults. Should H5N1 evolve to a form as contagious as normal influenza, a pandemic could begin.

Once a fully contagious virus emerges, its global spread is considered inevitable. Given the speed and volume of international air travel today, the virus could spread rapidly, possible reaching all continents in less than 3 months. Three pandemics occurred in the previous century: “Spanish influenza” in 1918, “Asian influenza” in 1957 and Hong Kong influenza in 1968. The 1918 pandemic killed an estimated 40-50 million people worldwide. That pandemic was exceptional, is considered one of the deadliest disease events in the human history. Subsequent pandemics were much milder, with an estimated 2 million deaths in 1957 and 1 million deaths in 1968.

3. JUSTIFICATION FOR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS IN AFRICA

There is a potential risk that HPAI subtype H5N1 might be carried by wild water birds along migratory flyways to Africa. Some birds are currently nesting in the newly HPAI affected areas of Novosibirsk and Altai in Russia and will migrate for upcoming winter to Africa. Numbers of birds arriving in sub-Saharan Africa from Palaearctic are estimated to 3.8 billion birds, about one

million of which are water birds (Moreau 1972). More than 80% of Africa's land mass is receiving the migratory birds. There are four entry points (figure 1):

1. Strait of Gibraltar. Through this corridor, birds enter Morocco, proceeding through Mauritania to winter in West Africa.
2. Sicily and Malta channels. Birds enter Tunisia; proceed on through Algeria and Libya, to West Africa (via Mali), or Central Africa (via Chad). Most of the birds using this route fly from further north (including Russia)
3. Eastern Mediterranean Bab al Mandab. From this corridor, birds enter Africa through Djibouti and proceed through Ethiopia to East Africa.
4. River Jordan to Nile Valley corridor. This corridor is considered the most significant corridor for bird migration in the world, and is the main eastern corridor between Europe/Asia and Africa that is regularly used by over a million birds to pass through a series of bottleneck sites each season. From this corridor, birds enter Egypt and then fly through Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Southern Africa (Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa).

Sea birds and some shore birds, migrate along the western coastline of Africa beginning from Morocco, through West African coastline to southern Africa. Some do pass through the Straight of Gibraltar while others just fly west of the corridor.

Fig 1: Major routes used by migrating birds to enter in Africa

Source: Dr Yossi Leshem

Taking into consideration the next destinations of the migratory birds, which is Africa there is a strong believe that this continent is under serious threat. It is also recognized that Africa is the least prepared continent to address the control of HPAI. The major impact of the outbreak would be on the livelihoods of the poor rural communities (particularly women), which depend on poultry for their subsistence. The disease will affect a wide range of poultry, including chicken, duck, goose, turkey, guinea fowl, and pigeon, ostriches and this will cause severe economic hardships at the rural level. The total losses from deaths or culling of poultry are expected to be 165 million heads (15% of the poultry population) or about 495 million USD.

Scientists believe that pandemic influenza will happen but when it will occur remains unknown. Supplies of vaccines and antiviral drugs the two most important interventions for reducing illness and deaths during a pandemic will be inadequate in all countries at the start of a pandemic and for many months thereafter. On present trends, many developing countries including most of African countries will have no access to vaccines throughout the duration of a pandemic. According to WHO a relative conservative estimate – from 2 million to 7.4 million deaths would be recorded.

In the particular case of Africa the poultry production and marketing systems bring close contact between human being and birds. This increases the risk of transmission of the virus from birds to humans creating appropriate conditions for the occurrence of pandemic influenza.

In view of the eminent threat to the continent by the HPAI, the seventh AU Conference of Ministers Responsible for African Animal Resource held between 31 October - 4th November 2005 in Kigali Rwanda made the following resolutions on the prevention and control of Avian Influenza:

Considering:

- the situation of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in the world and its threat to the African continent,

- the impact of the disease on food security, incomes of African populations and particularly the poor,

- the actions already implemented by international organizations i.e. FAO, OIE and WHO to coordinate the fight against Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in infected countries.

- the need for Africa to have appropriate means to address the eventual introduction of the disease into the continent

    - the importance of the forthcoming conference on avian influenza in Geneva from 7th to 9th November 2005 organized under the auspices of FAO, OIE, WHO and World Bank in view of mobilizing financial resources to control the disease.

The Conference

- endorses the recommendations of the symposium on HPAI organized by AU/IBAR in September 2005 in Nairobi, validated by the 11th PACE Advisory Committee Meeting and the fifth Executive Committee of ALIVE.

- requests AU/IBAR in collaboration with FAO, OIE, WHO and other partners, to take all the necessary steps to organize in the near future a meeting to assess the efficacy of the suggested strategies by AU/IBAR.

- invites African countries to strengthen their capacities in the field of surveillance of animal diseases, HPAI in particular and to avail emergency funds. Appeals to development partners to mobilize funds to support national and regional efforts.

- Note with gratitude the announcement of availability of funds and support from the FAO, the European Union, the World Bank and other bilateral development including the United States of America

- requests donors to urgently mobilize the necessary resources to support the current efforts being undertaken by African countries at national and regional levels

In response to the resolutions adopted by the seventh AU Conference of Ministers Responsible for African Animal Resource, the AUC through its technical of IBAR developed a comprehensive programme of action on emergency preparedness for the prevention and eventual control of the disease in the continent.

4. AU-IBAR PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE CONTROL OF HPAI.

4.1. National level

Three possible options defined:

1: Stamping out

This option is applicable in countries with an efficient epidemiological surveillance system and adequate financial resources for compensation. Its implementation allows rapid containment of the disease. The following actions have to be implemented.

- Destruction of infected and at-risk (depending on likelihood that birds are infected) poultry.
- As quickly as possible (within 24 h).
- Samples taken for shipment to reference laboratories.
- Vaccination of workers applying culling.
- Destruction of poultry in humanly manner.
- Accurate records

2: Modified stamping out using vaccination

- Destruction of infected poultry
- Use of vaccination among poultry population at risk: Reduces susceptibility to infection and decreases, shedding therefore reduces the incidence of new cases and viral load in the environment. Tool to maximize bio-security.
- Vaccination in response to an outbreak: ring vaccination or vaccination of designated high-risk poultry.

3: Vaccination in the high-risk areas

Pre-emptive “baseline” vaccination of all part of a population of poultry may be used if the risk of infection is high and/or the consequences of infection are very serious.

In addition to all three options eeffective disease surveillance for early detection, reporting, bio-security, control of movement of birds and products and disposal of carcasses and potential infective material in a bio-secure manner are applied.

4.2. Regional level

AU-IBAR will carry out the following activities:

- Provide support to regional laboratories and epidemiological investigations
- Harmonization and Coordination of all control activities at continental level
- Take the necessary steps to make the Emergency Funds and vaccine stockpiles available to member states.
- Provide support for the preparation of the national strategies for the prevention and control/eradication.
- Maintain International Cooperation, especially with OIE and FAO
- Assist AU Member States for the preparation of the donors’ conference to be held in Beijing, China in January 2006.

The above programme of action will be addressed by the following activities and interventions through:

- Creation of awareness, sensitization and popularization of HPAI among the 53 African member states.
- Strengthening national, regional and continental surveillance of the disease.
- Development of Technical capacities for early warning, early action and reliable laboratory diagnostic provision.
- Training workshops, and study tours to affected countries for the exchange of experiences.
- Provision of supply of emergency vaccine stock.
- Availing emergency fund for rapid intervention in case of the occurrence of the disease.

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